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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA/INS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV SOCI PTER CE LTTE

SUBJECT: UNICEF REPORTS SPIKE IN LTTE CHILD RECRUITMENT IN BATTICALOA

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SUMMARY  
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1. (U) United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) issued a press statement saying there has been a significant increase in the number of reports concerning child recruitment by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) during the month of July. Since the tsunami, UNICEF had seen a considerable decline in reports of LTTE child enlistment until July, when reports to UNICEF of the LTTE's recruitment of minors rose substantially. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) has also received increased reports of child recruitment by the LTTE in July, while Save the Children noted an increase in pressure on children to re-enlist in Jaffna. Meanwhile, press reports indicated that parents of students at a school in Batticaloa protested after hearing from an unknown source that the children were in danger of being abducted by the LTTE. Newspapers also reported that a number of signs have been posted in Jaffna urging the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) to protect minors from LTTE recruitment. However, the UNICEF statement did say that the LTTE released nine underage cadres to parents in Killinochchi on July 17. The SLA also told the press that three minors escaped the LTTE after being abducted at a temple festival on July 21. The UN Security Council has resolved to start monitoring child recruitment in Sri Lanka starting in 2006, a directive supported by the Government of Sri Lanka. End summary.

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NGOs SEE MORE RECRUITMENT INCREASED  
PRESSURE TO RE-ENLIST IN JAFFNA AND  
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2. (U) UNICEF received 14 reports of underage recruitment in May in the Batticaloa district. According to their press statement, there were 18 cases reported in June and 28 in the first three weeks of July. This is a sizeable increase, especially considering there were only 24 cases reported to UNICEF island-wide for the month of May.

3. (SBU) Hagrup Haukland, head of the SLMM, told poloff that there has been an increase in reports concerning underage enlistees for the month of July. Haukland added that the SLMM will issue its July report in the beginning of August.

4. (SBU) Julian Chellappah, a Save the Children representative, told poloff on July 26 that his organization has not received any increase in reports from eastern districts regarding LTTE underage enlistment. However, Chellappah did receive reports of significant pressure being placed on children who were released by the LTTE in the past to rejoin in Jaffna. Chellappah told poloff that Save the Children and UNICEF are coordinating at the district level in the north to find out more. The two organizations will meet on August 3 to discuss the next steps in preventing and monitoring underage recruitment in accordance with the Action Plan for Children Affected By War, devised in 2003 by UNICEF and the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) and agreed to by the LTTE.

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PARENTS PROTEST IN BATTICALOA  
AND CAMPAIGN IN JAFFNA  
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5. (U) According to a July 28 SLA statement to the press, parents removed their children from the Sandiweli Maha Vidyalya school in Batticaloa upon hearing that grade 11 students were being targeted for abduction by the LTTE. The SLA said that after taking their children home, about 50 parents returned to the school to protest the ongoing child recruitment by the LTTE. The military noted that the protest lasted for 3 hours and caused authorities to close the school. The SLA said that the remaining students also went home due to fears of abduction and recruitment by the LTTE.

16. (SBU) The SLA reports to the media also said that on July 25, parents began a poster campaign in the Jaffna district urging the SLA to protect their children from becoming Tamil Tiger enlistees. The paper carrying the SLA statement said that parents in Jaffna have been complaining that their children are being abducted by the LTTE and given weapons training.

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RECRUITMENT NUMBERS UP,  
BUT REASONS REMAIN UNCLEAR  
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17. (SBU) The rise in recruitment comes during a popular season for temple festivals, the most common place for the LTTE to seek underage enlistees. However, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UNICEF have installed a presence at temple festivals, and until this point, have been successful in eliminating LTTE underage recruitment at these events. (Note: Recruitment periods also tend to be cyclical, with an increase in enlistments every three to four months, corresponding with the beginning of a new training session. However, recruitment did not follow this trend for several months after the tsunami.) The reports of increased child recruitment come in after LTTE political wing leader S.P. Thamilselvam renewed his promise June 18 to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ann Veneman, to halt the practice.

18. (U) According to a military press statement, on July 21 the LTTE abducted three minors at a temple festival who later escaped and went to SLA authorities. The report noted that these children from Batticaloa, kidnapped while performing religious rites, were taken to Sampoor for weapons training. (Note: We could not confirm whether UNICEF or other NGOs were present at this festival.)

19. (SBU) On July 26, Geoffrey Keele, UNICEF Spokesperson, told poloff that UNICEF is unsure if there has been an increase in the number of abductions for recruitment purposes.

110. (SBU) In a July 28 meeting, Senior State Counsel Yasantha Kodagoda told poloff that it is quite clear from the increased reports to UNICEF that LTTE child recruitment is on the rise. Kodagoda speculated that the increase in recruitment signals either a desperation of the LTTE to strengthen its military forces, preparation for leaving the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) signed in 2002, or a political strategy to present the group as a greater threat. No matter what the LTTE's reasons, Kodagoda said, current UNICEF policy is not working to deter child recruitment.

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INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE: PRESIDENT'S  
REQUEST AND UN INVOLVEMENT  
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111. (U) At a July 25 meeting with the Tokyo Donor Conference Co-Chairs, President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga noted that the LTTE continues to recruit child soldiers in violation of the CFA. She asked the international community to keep exerting pressure on the terrorist organization to stop accepting underage cadres.

112. (U) On July 26, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution to monitor nations or rebel groups that kill, maim, or sexually abuse children in war zones, or recruit them as soldiers. The UN is disappointed with the continued recruitment and use of children in armed conflict by the LTTE, and will begin monitoring Sri Lanka in 2006.

113. (U) The Sri Lankan Foreign Ministry issued a media release on July 28 supporting the UN Security Council resolution and the effort of the UN to protect children from armed conflict. The GSL said that the resolution is an opportunity for the LTTE to show its commitment to follow humanitarian norms that will allow them to gain more credibility in the political realm.

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COMMENT  
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114. (SBU) As the protests in Batticaloa and Jaffna demonstrate, parents are becoming more vocal about their anger about the recruitment of minors, and they may serve as a significant force in pressuring the LTTE to stop using child soldiers. Whereas before the CFA, parents feared the LTTE and did not speak out about child recruitment, this fear has slowly been channeled into protest. After the CFA, parents complained primarily to the SLMM about child recruitments. In the last six months, parents have become more active, protesting the abduction and recruitment of children directly to the LTTE as well as to international

organizations.

15. (SBU) In addition to enraged parents bringing pressure to bear on the LTTE, the UN Security Council's directive may also prove useful in exerting international pressure on the LTTE to limit child recruitment. Septel update to follow next week.  
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